



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



June – July, 2006

Volume: III, Issue: 4

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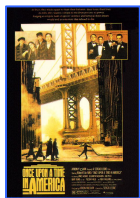
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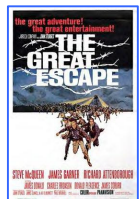
Upcoming Films:

Sweeping Epics (Bi-weekly Friday Films)



June 02

Once Upon a Time in America



June 16

The Great Escape



June 30

Ben - Hur

All films at 6:00 p.m.
at Film Chamber Theater
Gemini Circle Chennai - 6

Seats on a first come first
served basis

Co-sponsored by
The Madras Film Society

KNOW U.S.

Consulate Chennai's Public Affairs Section recently sponsored a huge "Know U.S. Challenge" quiz program, at the American Corner in Bangalore. The program brought together 40 college students from 36 colleges throughout south India. The students competed, in teams and individually, testing their knowledge of U.S. history, culture, geography and the arts. When the dust had settled, A.V.V. Prasad, an Economics student from Hyderabad, was crowned the inaugural "Indo-US Student Ambassador." His prize for winning was a brand new laptop computer (see page 2). Three runner-ups—from Mangalore, Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram—won Apple iPod music players. All of the contestants had a wonderful time—traveling to and staying overnight in Bangalore, making new friends, and showing off their impressive knowledge. Legendary playwright and actor Girish Karnad was the Chief Guest, and handed over the top prizes. The event, which was televised nationally, webcast to millions and performed before a capacity audience, underscored the Consulate's commitment to education, youth outreach and American Studies, while showing off the impressive resources of our American Corner. —*Christopher Wurst, Editor, In Touch South India*



With this issue of "In Touch South India" we bid farewell to two of the Consulate General's stalwarts and the two officers responsible for making this publication the vibrant, information filled product that it is. Our Public Affairs Officer, Ravi Candadai, who had the idea for "In Touch" and who got it off the ground, departs in June for reassignment to Mexico. Christopher Wurst, who has edited "In Touch" for the past two years and who has given it its lively style and colorful look, departs in July for reassignment to Zambia. They both have done a great job in Chennai. We will miss them and their families very much, and we wish them all "Poittu Vanke." We hope they will indeed stay in touch.

Those of us who remain, and their replacements, will do our best to keep their excellent work going.

—**David T. Hopper, Consul General**

Q & A: PUBLIC AFFAIRS LOOKS BACK ON THREE YEARS OF UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS

Note: In place of the regular Q&A feature, the outgoing Public Affairs Section (PAS)—Public Affairs Officer Ravi Candadai, and Deputy Public Affairs Officer Christopher Wurst—look back on a period of unprecedented activity, engagement and success.

CW: I've been here less than two years, the relationship between India and the U.S. has literally blossomed in this short time. I've been here while both countries' leaders paid state visits, and seen how rapidly progress has been made across the board—from technology to trade to education exchange and even space exploration. But for you Ravi, having been born here (in Hyderabad), but having been away for nearly 30 years, the changes must seem all the more profound.

RC: Having left India in 1977 to get my MBA in the U.S., it was a sort of homecoming for me when I arrived in Chennai in October 2003 as the PAO. Even the brief visits to Hyderabad in this intervening period had not prepared me for the stunning transformation that India had undergone. The impact of the IT revolution, not just in the metros, but in the hinterland (I checked out over 120 TV channels in Bidar!), broad and deep consumer choices (eye-popping food courts in malls), and a potent middleclass (I don't think there's anyone left in India without a cell phone now) have all combined to make India one of the most

exciting places to live and experience. As you point out Chris, I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to work and live in India -- during this historic era for our two countries.

CW: It is historic. And I think that is reflected in the scope of our activities here. We must have one of the busiest PAS offices in the world. I mean, I remember going weeks sometimes, where either you or I (or sometimes both of us!) would be traveling, doing a myriad of different programs throughout south India. I had the pleasure of touring Kerala with now-California Poet Laureate Al Young; we conducted meaningful HIV/AIDS awareness programs throughout the whole of the south, for tens of thousands of people. I traveled with speakers on any number of topics, from the economics costs of terrorism to disability rights to good governance. Oh, and then there was the fantastic jazz quartet in Bangalore. What have been some of your favorites?

RC: Connecting with young Indians --all upbeat about their futures-- and meeting visionary policy makers raring to transform India are memories I will cherish. Tirunelveli, Calicut, Vizag, and Gulbarga, where I met school children, college students, and their teachers, are special places for me now. Collaborating with eminent educators like Madras University (happy Sesquicentennial anniversary MU!) vice chancellor Dr. Thyagarajan and Father Alfonse was a distinct



Positive Images



Consul General David Hopper accepts a memento from IIT-Madras Director M.S. Ananth after delivering a guest lecture at the university.



Playwright and actor Girish Karnad presents an HP laptop computer to "Know U.S. Challenge" champion A.V.V. Prasad from Hyderabad, as Quizmaster Christopher Wurst looks on.



NASA Administrator Dr. Michael Griffin with ISRO's D. Madhavan Nair, at the historic MoU signing in Bangalore.

honor. Thanks to them, discussions are underway to introduce a community college system where every Indian, rich or poor,



get an entry level management track job, was unforgettable. The US Speaker program you mention Chris, played a key role in this initiative as well: the President of Northern Virginia Community college was the US Speaker who used the US community college system as a model, helped get us started on this new world of possibilities for young Indians.

CW: Yes. I've really enjoyed all of the students and educators I've met here. But then, with the great variety we have in our job, we're able to see this incredible cross section of Indian society. One day I might be in a slum area somewhere, watching as committed people are demonstrating the effective work they are doing teaching people about AIDS, or making schools more accountable, trying to clean up the environment or providing shelter for railway children...and the next day I might be meeting with a corporate or political leader. But, to me, both the people working from the bottom up and from the top down share the passion to make this a better country. At the end of the day,

though, I am always happiest in front of a group of Indian students. This last program we did ("Know U.S.—see



rural or urban, young or old, by joining a 2-year "Associate Degree" from a community college can either transfer to a regular bachelor's degree or get

Consular Corner:

U.S. Consulate -- Chennai Prepares for 2006 Student Visa Season

India sends more students to the U.S. than any other country. Studying a vast variety of subjects at a wide range of institutions, these students facilitate a vital educational and cultural exchange between the U.S. and India, and set the stage for future relationships in business, science, the arts, and more.

There are some helpful tips that those applying for a student visa should consider. According to Carol Cox, the Deputy Chief of the Nonimmigrant Visa Section, "prospective students hoping to apply for a visa this summer will need to prepare in advance. Review the application guidance on the U.S. Consulate -- Chennai website at http://chennai.usconsulate.gov/student_f1_visas.html, as well as the State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

In response to the time requirements needed to process a visa, the Department of State has increased the application timeframe for students to 120 days before their enrollment date. While this anticipates allowing sufficient time for all prospective students to apply for a visa, there continues to be great demand for student visa appointments.

At their interview, suggests Cox, "prospective students should be able to explain to the satisfaction of the consular officer their chosen field of study and how they intend to use their education upon completion of their studies. Students should ask themselves whether they are educationally, professionally, and financially committed to acquiring a degree at a U.S. institution. That commitment will show through to the consular officer."

Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Maura Harty, who oversees consular operations around the world, is frequently asked for her views on the importance that foreign students play in American education. She has strongly emphasized, "We don't want to lose even one international student."

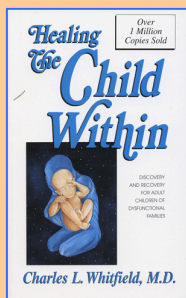
"Outside of a dog, a man's best friend is a book. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read." (Groucho Marx)

Tammy Latimer
Nurse:

Healing the Child Within

by Charles L. Whitfield
(1987)

This book was published in 1987 and is dedicated to the Child Within each of us. It describes the journey of discovery and the healing of our fears, confusion and unhappiness.

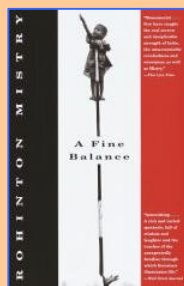


Brooke P. Spelman
Vice Consul:

A Fine Balance

by Rohinton Mistry (2001)

Set in 1970s India during the state of emergency, this book weaves an intricate tale of four ordinary people thrown together by chance and coincidence struggling to survive.



Mark A. Russell
Consul:

A Man in Full

by Tom Wolfe (1998)

It is a satire that portrays a high flying real estate mogul amid the intricate social dynamics of modern day Atlanta as the vibrant capital of the New South.



front cover) was a great program—where we met 40 talented students from all over the south. That’s my favorite audience.

RC: Looks like we are in total agreement: there’s nothing like chatting with students at Pragati College over bhelpuri in a nearby “adda” in Sultan Bazar about US higher education or discussing the role of Islam in the United States with eager scholars at Darul-UI-Uloom in Mysore. It’s through such interactions with these bright students that affirmed –for me-- the relevance of US public diplomacy, not just in India, but in the rest of the world as well. I’m sure you have similar examples as well.

CW: A particularly lively exchange with brilliant history students at Fatima College in Madurai springs to mind, as does a session on U.S. education at Chennai’s Murthuzaviya Educational and Cultural Foundation, where I was overwhelmed by so many students who were convinced that education was going to be their road to success. Another part of my job—our job—that I love is recruiting Indians for the International Visitor Exchange Program (IV). First, I get to meet a huge group of talented Indians from nearly every background. We match them with exciting exchange programs in the U.S. Since one of the prerequisites of the IV program is that people should not have much previous international travel, our IV grantees invariably come back from their programs with many new, firsthand impressions about the U.S. To a person, they always tell me that the U.S. is much more diverse and complicated than they originally thought it would be. But in my two years I’ve never met anyone who had a bad time or who wouldn’t go back if given the opportunity. It’s one of my favorite programs, because when you experience something firsthand you have a much richer understanding, and the more you understand about a culture, I believe, the easier it is to find ways to do constructive work together.

RC: The best part of the IV process is “shoot out” at the Embassy in Delhi where our nominees are pitted against their competitors from other consulates in India as well as from the Embassy for a limited number of slots. I’m very pleased that candidates from South India have fared well in the final selections and are well represented in the overall mix.

CW: My two years in India have flown by. There have been many lasting impressions. Riding through a small Tamil Nadu village in a bullock cart on Pongal will always rank high. So will appearing with the then-Consul General on a popular Tamil television cooking show. And, of course, my 2.5 seconds of glory—as “Man With Luggage Cart”—in the forthcoming Rajanikanth film! But more important were the “Indian” family

moments: teaching my son how to play cricket, listening to my daughter sing Sa Pa Sa, eating my wife’s amazing India fusion cooking, or, quite simply, eating every Malgoa mango I could get my hands on!

RC: For me, nothing beats taking the train, especially an overnight one. All my life I had wanted to take the famous Ooty toy train from Conoor to Metupalayam, made famous in movies and literature. My wish finally came true in this tour. Last year, my wife and our three little children, after a weekend in Ootacamund (Udhagamandalam), took the breathtaking ride down the steep Nilgiri Mountains over dozens of bridges and what seemed hundreds of tunnels, with stunning views throughout. Just a week ago, I went to Hyderabad to take leave of my mother. Almost on a whim, instead of heading to the



airport, I hopped on the overnight Charminar Express from Madras Central. I must have stepped on and off platforms at every stop from Sulurpet to Secunderabad, and conversed with very passenger and railway employee –awake, that is-- in my compartment that night. Going over the sacred Krishna River around midnight, and sipping tea in Warangal with the train conductor as the Sun was just coming up, India’s heartland was as exciting this time as it was when my parents took me

on a similar trip decades ago. On this train trip, the last one of this tour, I went alone. I wanted this memory for myself.

CW: Nice. At the beginning of this conversation we both alluded to the fact that this has been a truly amazing time to be here. It seems to me that, in the words of both Prime Minister Singh and President Bush, even though Indo-US relations are at an all-time high, the best is yet to come. I look forward to my next assignment, as PAO in Lusaka, Zambia, but I will miss the excitement of India. Not a week goes by, it seems, when there isn’t some type of high-level visit to south India, or some important relationship established. People in the U.S. are so much more aware of India today than they were even five years ago. And, as I always tell students here, all things Indian are very hip in the U.S. right now, from movies to music to fashion to food. I’m already preparing myself to be a little bit jealous to be away from such a vibrant moment in our countries’ relations.

RC: I never imagined I would shake hands with two U.S. Presidents on Indian soil. I had the double honor of receiving President Clinton in Chennai in July 2005, and greeting President Bush at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad in March 2006. You couldn’t find two better friends of India. I was just lucky enough to be at the right place and the right time, as history was being written by our great democracies.